



**Title of Meeting:** Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF) Sub-Group on Agricultural Pollution

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**Date of Meeting:** 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018

**Venue:** Pwllpeiran Upland  
Research Centre,  
Cwmystwyth,  
Aberystwyth  
SY23 4AB

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**Present:** Zoe Henderson (NRW Board Member and Chairperson)  
Charlotte Priddy (FUW)  
Dennis Matheson (Tenant Farmers Association)  
Eirwen Williams (Menter a Busnes)  
Stephen Bradley (DCWW)  
Creighton Harvey (Carmarthenshire Fishermen's Federation)  
Marc Williams (NRW)  
Brian Pawson (NRW)  
Matt Lowe (NRW)  
Jeremy Frost (Welsh Government)  
Jamie McCoy (AHDB)  
James Dowling (Welsh Government)  
Kirsten Hughes (HCC)  
Geraint Weber (NRW)  
Rob McCall (NRW)  
Helen Haider (NRW)

**Apologies:** Betsan John (Welsh Government)  
Bernard Griffiths (FUW)  
Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU)  
Ryan Davies (Welsh Government)  
Andrew Chambers (Welsh Government)  
Sarah Hetherington (NRW)  
Meinir Wigley (NRW)  
Bob Vaughan (NRW)

**In Attendance:** Arfon Williams (Wales Environment Link) Item 14 & 15 only  
Stephen Marsh-Smith (Wales Environment Link) Item 14 & 15 only

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### 3. Update on NRW Dairy Advice Project

Eight agricultural officers are now in place to deliver the dairy advice project work. Induction training has been completed and the new NRW staff are currently undertaking accompanied visits with experienced staff members. Approximately 350 dairy farms are to be visited in 2018/19. Most of the new officers are from a farming background whilst the others have relevant transferable skills. Training has taken place at the YFC building in Builth Wells with assistance from AHDB, WG Farm Liaison Service and Farming Connect. The new NRW officers will then be going to Harper Adams University on 10<sup>th</sup> October for additional external training.

All farms to be visited will have been risk assessed beforehand. A pre-visit letter has been drafted and sent to Farming Unions for comment. Where advisors from Farming Connect have provided a farm with an infrastructure report, with a copy provided to NRW and the timescales for improvements agreed, NRW would not undertake an additional visit.

The database for capturing the farm information is not yet ready, so information will be captured on a spreadsheet with a standardised report to be drafted for each farm. There is no intention to duplicate work being done by others. e.g. Afonydd Cymru. If, however a farm is within a failing waterbody under WFD, then NRW may still visit. The new officers will have a Level 1 (Basic) Warrant. Regulation 7 SSAFO Regs notices will be served on farms depending upon risk as NRW need to demonstrate that there is a 'significant pollution risk' to serve these notices. Data gathered via this project will be used to inform future regulatory activity by NRW. It is possible that the number of Regulation 7 notices served will increase as a result of this project. Building a new slurry store to increase capacity will not be the only option for ensuring farmers meet the minimum storage capacity requirement of 4 months under the SSAFO Regulations. Other solutions include covering storage facilities, covering yards and diverting clean water away from storage facilities. Farmers requiring technical advice will be signposted to Farming Connect. It was confirmed that NRW are currently working with WG to ensure farmers are signposted to where they can obtain the rainfall data required to ensure that slurry storage facilities are SSAFO compliant.

***Action Point 1: Matt Lowe to ensure date on whether slurry is applied to land or exported is amongst the information gathered by the new NRW officers***

#### 4. Agri Pollution 2010-2018 Graph

The group discussed the numbers of substantiated agricultural pollution incidents to water (by sector) up to August 2018. This preliminary dataset updates the information included within the interim report to the Cabinet Secretary. Further work is required to identify the severity of the incidents that have been substantiated.

Other data may be available to help put NRW's agri-pollution incident data into context. For example, Welsh Water have data available on the numbers of extreme pollution events that have led to the closure of an abstraction point. Further work is being done on the correlation between poor weather and the number of pollution incidents. Also, the WFD interim classification for 2018 will shortly be available.

The group also discussed how best to promote self-reporting of incidents by farmers. During 2018 only 2% of incidents appear have been self-reported but gathering information on this has only been a mandatory part of NRW's incident reporting system (WIRS) for the last 2-3 months. It was noted that if a farmer self-reports an incident to NRW, this action will be taken into consideration when determining the enforcement outcome.

***Action Point 2: Geraint Weber/Marc Williams to liaise with DCWW/NRW colleagues as part of ensuring that NRW's agri-pollution data can be placed into a broader context.***

The group discussed the benefit of members writing articles on agri-pollution statistics and publicising the benefits of self-reporting. As part of the short film on agri pollution recently produced by Farming Connect, it states that the self-reporting of incidents will be taken into account when considering enforcement outcomes. Despite this, many farmers are encouraged by their legal advisors not to self-report and remain unaware that this will reduce the costs of NRW's investigative work and any costs that may be imposed by the courts.

***Action Point 3: Brian Pawson to work with NRW legal team and Creighton Harvey to develop appropriate NRW messaging in relation to self-reporting of pollution incidents and subsequent NRW enforcement outcomes.***

Further discussion took place regarding the possibility of having agri pollution targets, much like the water companies have (e.g. 75% target for self-reporting) to monitor performance.

It was highlighted that some farmers continue to disregard the CoGAP

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requirements in relation to slurry application and that spreading frequently takes place during unsuitable weather conditions.

## 5. WG EU Transition Fund Update

Brian Pawson explained that the NRW proposal for 'Improving the Sustainability of Agricultural Supply Chains Through Enhancing Water Quality' (as submitted to Welsh Government on 10<sup>th</sup> August) was not approved for progression as part of Tranche 2. The Environment and Rural Affairs sector have already received significant funds. NRW are currently trying to obtain feedback from WG on the proposal, looking into the possibility of it being amended and re-submitted in subsequent bidding rounds.

***Action Point 4: Brian Pawson to report back on any further feedback from Welsh Government in relation to the EU Transition Fund bid on water quality.***

## 6. Farming Connect Agri-Pollution Delivery Programme

Eirwen Williams reported that nine Sustainable Farming events had taken place over September with between 150-450 farmers attending each session. More farmers seemed to be wanting advice on managing rainfall and reducing the volume of slurry that they need to store rather than applying for new slurry stores via the SPG grant.

Farming Connect are now arranging on-farm events within the targeted catchments identified by the sub-group. A host farm for these events has now been secured in all but one of the catchments. Farming Connect have not yet been able to obtain up-to-date farm address data from Welsh Government and this.

***Action Point 5: Betsan John (Welsh Government) to provide an update on enabling Farming Connect to access current farm address data.***

Five Agrisgôp groups have been formed as a result of the recent Farming Connect events. In addition, 26 group applications have been made for the SMS, although not all of these relate to water quality.

***Action Point 6: Farming Connect to circulate the final figures regarding the Sustainable Farming events and the list of on-farm events***

Zoe Henderson congratulated Farming Connect on their excellent programme of work.

## 7. "Brexit and our Land" (WG Green Paper)

The group discussed the case for submitting a combined response to

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the WG consultation. Chapter 7 of the Green Paper has clear links to the WLMF interim report with many parallels between the two. The group agreed to submit a short response to the consultation, highlighting the value of using the WLMF sub-group as a “sounding board” for discussing future approaches to regulatory issues.

***Action Point 7: Rob McCall and Brian Pawson to prepare a short response to the Green Paper on behalf of the WLMF sub-group and circulate the draft to members for approval***

## **8. Wales Environment Link (WEL) comments on the WLMF Interim Report**

Prior to the presentation by Stephen Marsh-Smith and Arfon Williams, a short discussion took place on the ways in which WEL might be able contribute in future to the work of the sub-group. It was noted that Afonydd Cymru (one of the members of WEL) have been undertaking farm visits in South West Wales with funding provided by DCWW and NRW. Some 50 farm reports have been completed to date in two river catchments. A limited amount of grant funding (10K to be distributed at a maximum grant rate of 50% per project) is available to deliver infrastructure improvements on farms and has resulted in a high uptake of visits.

***Action Point 8: Helen Haider to circulate a copy of Zoe Henderson’s response letter to WEL.***

Sub-group members were concerned that many members of public are unaware of the condition of local catchments. It was felt that the various organisations involved in WEL might be able to help raise the level of community interest in future.

Another way in which the sub-group could work more closely with WEL would be on specific topics such as the regulatory aspects of the WG Green paper. This might enable the development of a co-ordinated approach across the agricultural sector and environmental NGO’s which could then be fed-back to the Cabinet Secretary.

It was agreed that these issues would be raised with the WEL representatives during the afternoon session.

## **9. Local Authority Planning Issues**

Robert McCall noted that there has been some confusion in the past between the Local Authorities and NRW over specific responsibilities in relation to dealing with planning applications, although these difficulties are now being ironed out. The CFF, Carmarthenshire Rivers Trust and Afonydd Cymru have already met with Carmarthenshire County Council and a further meeting involving NRW is now being planned. The focus

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up until now has been on Carmarthenshire owing to the prevalence of the dairy sector and the extent of agricultural pollution issues.

An all-Wales approach to the planning issues raised in the WLMF interim report is also needed. Rob McCall is aiming to set up an event during early 2019 and will liaise with the WLMF sub group so that member organisations can update farmers.

***Action Point 9: Rob McCall to circulate further information on planning issues to all WLMF sub-group members prior to the Action Planning meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> Oct.***

## 10. Arrangements for future sub-group meetings

- 8 October - Action Planning Meeting (WG offices, Aberystwyth)
- 11 October – following the full WLMF meeting (WG offices, Aberystwyth)
- 7 November (WG offices, Aberystwyth)
- 12 December (FUW offices, Aberystwyth)

## 11. Minutes from meeting on 22 Aug & outstanding action points

Action Point 1: Creighton Harvey to circulate flyer from the recent NFU Cymru/CFF event to the rest of the sub group.

Action Point 6: AHBD- Jamie McCoy explained that the AHDB slurry wizard programme is currently unavailable, so members are unable to trial it.

***Action Point 10: Any comments from members regarding the draft minutes from 25<sup>th</sup> September should be sent to Helen Haider/Marc Williams by close of play on 9<sup>th</sup> October. This will enable the final version of the minutes to be translated and uploaded onto the NRW website.***

## 12. Update on relevant dairy activities

Zoe Henderson had attended the Dwr Cymru Independent Environmental Advisory Panel (IEAP) on 19<sup>th</sup> July to talk about the work of the WLMF sub-group. Zoe had also attended the DCWW Board Meeting as well as a meeting of the Dee & Clwyd Fisheries Advisory group.

CFF have been involved in work relating to the removal of blockages from a number of river catchments in Carmarthenshire. The CFF have also secured an additional 10K for Himalayan balsam removal.

## 13. AOB

The group discussed the potential for someone to write an article in the

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AHDB newsletter 'Forage for Knowledge' in relation to agri pollution.

Brian Pawson drew attention to NRW's recently published Working Together consultation:

<https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/consultations/our-own-consultations/?lang=en>

This is the first consultation leading up to the publication of updated River Basin Management Plans for the period 2011-27. NRW welcomes views on how on how stakeholders would like to get involved in refreshing and reviewing these plans. The consultation closes on 22 December 2018.

Jeremy Frost mentioned that mandatory catch and release proposals (affect anglers with rod licences) will be going to Public Inquiry in November 2018. There is an opportunity for the WLMF to make a submission provided this is done before the end of March 2019.

#### 14. Wales Environment Link

Zoe Henderson provided an introduction to the work of the WLMF sub-group and hoped it would be possible to work more closely with WEL in future as part of reducing agricultural pollution

Dr. Stephen Marsh-Smith (Afonydd Cymru) explained that WEL includes most of the environmental NGOs in Wales. There are over 40 members all of whom are also registered charities. Stephen gave a short presentation covering the work of Afonydd Cymru (the umbrella organisation representing the six Rivers Trusts across Wales) with particular reference to one of these (The Wye and Usk Foundation).

The work of the farm advisors employed by Afonydd Cymru is partly funded by Enforcement Undertakings arising from previous pollution incidents. Advice is primarily focused on reducing the extent of diffuse pollution e.g. by promoting the underplanting of maize and using software programmes such as SCIMAP to predict where pollution problems are most likely to occur, and any interventions are most likely to be successful.

The desired approach was summarised as:

- providing a model for managing pollution (via a targeted and local approach);
- ensuring fair prices to farmers;
- delivering fair and robust enforcement;
- providing independent advice and incentives
- ensuring clear legislation and regulation from Government

Arfon Williams (RSPB) welcomed the WLMF Interim Report but highlighted that WEL were concerned to see the development of an Action Plan that clarifies who is involved in taking forward each of the

recommendations as well as the timeline.

Arfon then provided a presentation on the work of RSPB with farmers in Gwent through the Living Levels project. This is a 3-year programme funded under the Sustainable Management Scheme and seeks to improve environmental quality across the board rather than just focussing on birds. The aim of the project is to show that looking after water, nature and food in combination can be a profitable way of farming. NFU Cymru, Farming Connect and NRW will all be involved in the Steering Group as well as 10 local farmers. There are a lot of synergies with the WLMF interim report in terms of combining advice and guidance, new technology and seeking to work more closely together through establishing a new Agriscop group. Further comments and advice from WLMF sub-group members would be welcome.

Following the presentations, there was an opportunity for further questions and clarifications. This was followed by a discussion on the ways in which WEL and the WLMF sub-group could work together more closely in future. One possibility that was welcomed by all present was the idea that WEL and the WLMF sub group could use the opportunities provided by the Green Paper to commence a shared discussion on the nature of future regulation.

## **15. Presentation and tour of Pwllpeiran**

Dr Meriecia Fraser of IBERS gave a presentation regarding the research undertaken at Pwllpeiran. This included the establishment of different management options within plots to restore botanical biodiversity and looking at the long-term impacts of the management regimes on wider ecosystem services.

Dr Fraser also talked about the other projects including testing the effectiveness of alternative renovation techniques as options for sustainable intensification on permanent pasture, sustainability of crops in the face of climatic and political change, use of Miscanthus as an alternative bedding source and growing Daffodils for galantamine production (for use as a treatment for Alzheimer's Disease)

The presentation was followed by a tour of the experimental plots led by John Davies. The tour also involved looking at the Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICW) previously constructed a way of testing the effectiveness of different contaminated water treatments prior to discharge to a watercourse.